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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUENOS AIRES 000562

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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: IBARRA'S REMOVAL CHANGES THE BUENOS  
AIRES POLITICAL PANORAMA

REF: A. BUENOS AIRES 00451

[1](#)B. BUENOS AIRES 00407

[1](#)C. 05 BUENOS AIRES 00141

Classified By: Ambassador Lino Gutierrez for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: On March 7, the Buenos Aires City Legislature voted to permanently remove Mayor Anibal Ibarra from office. Although the required ten votes for removal included mostly opposition legislators, the deciding vote came from a Kirchnerista, Helio Rebot. Ibarra's removal changes the political panorama in the Capital and the strategies of many leading political figures for the 2007 elections. Those in the GOA and in the opposition who wish to run for Mayor in 2007 or support a political ally for the job now face a more difficult path forward. Ibarra's departure is also exacerbating fissures in Macri's political alliance, still feeling the effects of the recent loss of four Lower House members and the departure of the center-right Ucede party. The Ibarra trial has played into the internal conflict within Kirchner's inner circle of advisors, with Alberto Fernandez reportedly losing ground to Planning Minister Julio De Vido and Legal and Technical Secretary Carlos Zannini. End Summary.

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[1](#)2. (SBU) In a closely watched vote on March 7, the legislature of Buenos Aires narrowly reached the required two-thirds majority on the special commission to permanently remove embattled Mayor Anibal Ibarra from office. With most of the opposition votes on the legislative commission never in doubt, the decisive blow to Ibarra came from Kirchnerista Helio Rebot's decision to support the Mayor's removal. POL contacts inside the Buenos Aires city legislature report that Rebot's decision against Ibarra was motivated by Rebot's dislike of both Ibarra and Cabinet Chief and head of the Buenos Aires Peronist Party Alberto Fernandez, who has been Ibarra's biggest defender in the Casa Rosada. With Ibarra's removal, Deputy Mayor Jorge Telerman will serve out the remainder of Ibarra's term until December 2007. (Note: Telerman has been the acting Mayor since November 2005, when the Buenos Aires legislature temporarily suspended Ibarra pending his formal trial in the legislature. See Reftel A for more on the impeachment proceedings. End Note.)

[1](#)3. (SBU) Ibarra's removal changes the political panorama in the Capital and the strategies of many leading political figures for the 2007 elections. Propuesta Republica's (PRO)

Mauricio Macri, the most visible supporter of Ibarra's removal, has now given up the idea of again running for Mayor of Buenos Aires in 2007 and has instead begun to explore the possibility of a presidential run, according to POL contacts in the Macri camp. (Note: Macri unsuccessfully ran for mayor in 2003, winning the first round vote, but losing to Ibarra backed by President Kirchner in the second round. End Note.)

The deciding factors for Macri's decision were reportedly polls showing that he would again win a hypothetical first round vote for mayor and then lose in the second round, and also the prospect of facing Telerman after two years of experience on the job. Macri reportedly thinks it will be difficult to beat Kirchner in 2007, but feels that even an unsuccessful presidential bid would be better for his political future than another loss in a mayoral race. According to POL contacts in PRO, Macri's decision to possibly run for the presidency, although it reportedly will not be publicly announced for some time, is fueling a power struggle inside Macri's inner circle as to who will be the PRO candidate for Mayor in 2007. (Comment: Macri's political alliance is still recovering from a number of recent defections, including the departure of four national legislators and the center-right Ucede party. End Comment.)

¶4. (C) A political advisor to Juntos por Buenos Aires leader Diego Santilli, one of Macri's two blocs in the Buenos Aires legislature, told Poloff that Santilli and other Macri legislators with a Peronist background are considering defecting to Telerman. According to the political advisor, most of the Buenos Aires Peronists in Macri's camp are there because they saw Macri as the best alternative to Ibarra and/or because they dislike Alberto Fernandez. With someone the Peronists are comfortable with now in the mayor's office, many Macri Peronists are beginning to feel their interests are better served outside of Macri's fractious alliance. The political advisor lamented Macri's decision to support

BUENOS AIR 00000562 002 OF 002

Ibarra's removal, arguing that Macri allowed his personal dislike for Ibarra to cloud his judgment. The advisor told Poloff that a few months ago Ibarra offered Macri a deal. For one Macri vote on the commission, either for Ibarra or in abstention, Ibarra said he would not attack Macri during the proceedings nor blame Macri if he was removed from office. The political advisor lamented that Macri did not take that deal because PRO's internal polling showed that Macri's negatives had rebounded to the high levels before the October elections due to Ibarra's public claims that the effort to remove him was really a coup d'etat by Macri.

¶5. (SBU) Other leading political figures like Alberto Fernandez and Vice President Daniel Scioli that hoped to become Kirchner's candidate for mayor in 2007 now have to resign themselves to the fact that Telerman, provided he continues to perform well on the job, will possibly have Kirchner's support for "reelection" in 2007. Former Foreign Minister Roberto Lavagna, who many said was considering a run for mayor or even president, announced the day after the Ibarra vote that he would not seek elective office.

¶6. (SBU) Our sources report that the Ibarra trail has played into the internal conflict within Kirchner's inner circle of advisors, with Alberto Fernandez losing ground to Planning Minister Julio De Vido and Legal and Technical Secretary Carlos Zannini. Buenos Aires has been full of rumors in the last few weeks of an impending Cabinet change that would, among other things, include the replacement of Alberto Fernandez as Cabinet Chief by one of a handful of long-time "pinguino" associates of Kirchner (See Reftel B). (Comment: As President Kirchner manages any changes to his Cabinet personally and has made no statements on the issue, it remains to be seen if Kirchner will in fact initiate the personnel changes. End Comment.) Alberto Fernandez's main role in the inner circle has been to be Kirchner's advisor and advocate in Buenos Aires politics. With the defeat of Bielsa in October and now Ibarra's downfall, it is argued

that Alberto Fernandez has lost a lot of prestige and utility for Kirchner. (See Reftel C for more on Kirchner's inner circle.)

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17. (C) Mayor Ibarra's removal -- in the face of polls showing a majority of city residents favored Ibarra remaining in office and against the long-term interests of most of the major political actors in city politics -- demonstrates the power that a vocal segment of the victims' families has been able to exert over the city legislature. Ever since the Dirty War experience of the last military dictatorship (1976-1983), Argentines have had a profound aversion to any loss of life with political overtones. From the death of two piqueteros during demonstrations in 2002 to the recent death of a policeman during a labor dispute in Santa Cruz, the deaths of even a few individuals can have political consequences. Despite the fact that the responsibility for the deaths in the Cromagnon nightclub fire most clearly fell on the club owners, from the beginning, many of the victims' families and many city residents blamed the faulty system of regulation that Ibarra presided over. Diputado Rebot pointed to the "culture of impunity" that he said Ibarra fostered in his speech before the Commission, moments before casting his crucial vote.

18. (SBU) Ibarra's departure will make the path more difficult for those in the GOA and in the opposition who wish to run for Mayor in 2007 or support a political ally for the job. Kirchner, through De Vido and Zannini, appears to have already made peace with Telerman. However, given Ibarra's past status as a Kirchner ally and Kirchner's recent statement calling Ibarra "a friend," Ibarra's end is seen as at least a minor defeat for Kirchner. A positive note for Kirchner, however, is that the removal of Ibarra also removes the Cromagnon tragedy from the list of issues for the 2007 elections.

GUTIERREZ